

Fifteen Support Strategies for Advocating with Professionals

Almost every supporter will find him/herself in the position of having to advocate with various health services professionals for the needs of the individual they support. This list of strategies will help manage those negotiations.

1. **Remain aware and ahh-llowing:** i.e. Catch, Calm and Clarify.
2. **Build relationships.**
3. Stay aware that **all other professionals have a pre-programmed mind-set.** Use your awareness of possible filters for optimal communications: respond feelings to feelings, reasons to reasons.
4. **Ask permission** – “Can I give you an update on some **new** information?”
5. **Reports must be summarized** – not rambling with too much detail. Start big and move to detail as appropriate.
6. **Use relative descriptors** – “On a scale of 1-10, with 1 being a low level, in the morning _____’s pain/confusion etc. is at a level 7.”
7. **Use test questions** – “Do you want more detailed information than what I just gave you?”
8. **Use clarifying questions** – “Do you mean we should _____?”
9. **Redirect discussions** to the PwDD if possible and helpful, e.g. with eye contact focused on the PwDD, ask “Sam, what would you like to add/ask?”
10. **Use open questions** – e.g. What, How, When.
“What should we observe and record to help you determine _____?”
“How often should we _____?”
11. **Don’t talk** when the professional is thinking.
12. **Encourage the professional to lead** the conversation and redirect or direct as necessary and helpful, but you and the individual-supported stay focused to achieve your objectives e.g. “How else can we be helpful in this treatment plan?”
13. **Give concise summarized reports** followed by a clear question, e.g. “We have a concern, when (describe the behaviour) _____, then (describe the outcome) _____.What would you suggest?”
14. **Before leaving prepare for the next visit.** “What would you like us to do/track/report to you when we return?” or “If a new medication or strategy has been started _____?” Can we visit you in three to four weeks to see if we are on the right track?”
15. **Conclude with sincere gratitude**, e.g. “Thank you _____ for taking the time today to _____.”

Several of the needs we discuss below recommend that supporters search for and engage competent community professionals to assist with assessments and treatments. Being a competent advocate is therefore critical to facilitate this process.

Most resistance from others is a **problem of won't not can't** – they lack sufficient feeling reasons to change.

Supporter's Additional Solutions to Ensure Optimal Support Interventions:

- Carefully plan daily-support guides a few days in advance, with indoor and outdoor options.
- Provide a structured support environment that is friendly, safe, predictable, interesting and appropriately exciting.
- Avoid social situations in large, noisy settings with many people unless unavoidable (e.g. medical appointments).
- Keep the setting predictable and try to be with familiar people.
- Keep the time structured.
- Keep the PwDD informed by communicating: “This will happen and then this will happen.” (In general, talk out loud to yourself so that the individual-supported knows what you are doing and planning.)
- Slow the pace for movement and talking.
- Eliminate cell phone emissions: keep cell phones off.
- Use Conscious Care and Support de-escalation and calming strategies. (see below in Part THREE, Section Two: Calming)
- Give some choices to help the individual to organize thoughts and feelings, and create focus and calm.
- Provide cardio-exercise. This is critical: exercise has been proven in research to be as effective as antidepressant medication for all but severe clinical depressions.
- Develop a network of connectors to develop and grow the individual's positive gifts and attributes; for example, if the person likes to help others, provide suitable opportunities to volunteer help.
- Respond appropriately to the differing needs of introverts and extroverts.
- As a general rule, always let the person do what they can for themselves.